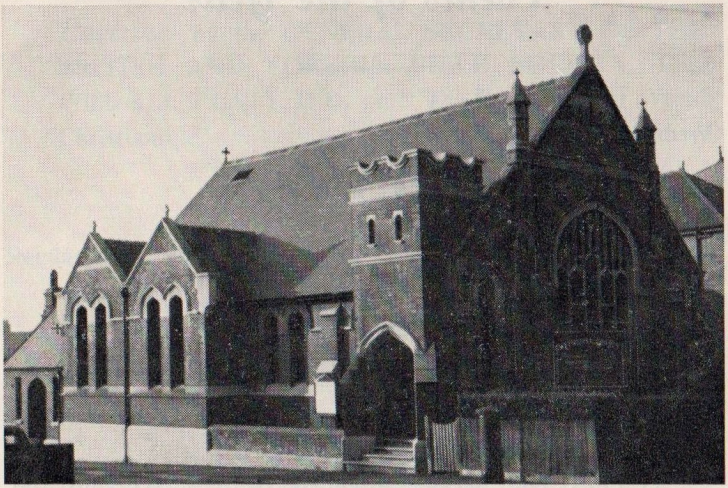
CHRIST CHURCH

(SPRINGFIELD ROAD METHODIST CHURCH)

1907 – 1957

Please return to Mrs M. Cullingworth
2, Parkhurst Close
Bexhill-on-Sea
E. Sussex
TN39 5DL



CHRIST CHURCH — SPRINGFIELD ROAD

Events of the Year

Wednesday, March 20th

Church Birthday Banquet

Saturday, April 6th

GIFT DAY

Sunday, April 7th

ANNIVERSARY SUNDAY

11 a.m. Civic Service attended by His Worship the Mayor of Bexhill and Members of the Council.

Preacher at 11 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. Rev. Frederick Latham.

Tuesday, April 9th

Service of Re-dedication and Public Meeting. Our special visitor will be THE SECRETARY OF THE METHODIST CONFERENCE,

REV. DR. ERIC BAKER, M.A.

Sunday, May 5th

Sunday School Anniversary at which the children will be taking part in special arrangements for the 50th Anniversary. Preacher at 11 a.m. and 6.30 p.m. Rev. R. S. Rawlings.

Wednesday, June 5th

Lecture **by the GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY, Rev. William J. PLATT, D.D. on " The Foundation of World Christianity."**

Sunday, June 9th

WHITSUNDAY. Visit of the Rev. Thomas M. Morrow, M.A. Chairman of the Bradford District and Warden of the Wesley Deaconess Order.

Thursday and Sunday, June 20th and 23rd

Womens' Guild Anniversary. Visit of Sister Margaret Statham.

Sunday, September 22nd

Visit of the Methodist Connexional Book Steward, Rev. Frank Cumbers, B.A., B.D. Theme: " The Ministry of the Printed Word."

The Little Chapel on the Hill

1825 . . . and Before.

Did John Wesley visit Bexhill? We have no record that he did, but it is known that he visited Rye on several occasions and that he preached his last outdoor sermon under " Wesley's Tree " at Winchelsea.

There must have been many other preaching places in the district, for in the year 1763 two ministers were appointed to the Rye Circuit.

It is known that there were many coastguards among Wesley's converts. At that time the coastguard's duty of patrolling the coast was most important owing to the fear of invasion by the French. So the good news of the Gospel preached by John Wesley spread from one coastguard station to another. Services were being held in villages right along the coast, except at Hastings where the new Faith met with severe opposition. At Bexhill, on the other hand, the response must have been considerable, for in the year 1809 there was a vigorous Methodist cause with 23 members, including coastguards.

Belle Hill in the Early Days.

In any early reference to Methodism in Bexhill, we find that " Belle Hill," not the Old Town, was the meeting place of our people. First they met in a cottage by the stream at the foot of the hill, and later in a loft over some stables next to the " White House." Then in the year 1825 the chapel was built on land bought from the Government after the soldiery had vacated it. The original chapel had seating accommodation for 100 persons. It was lit by tallow candles, and it is on record that two coastguards, Ashdown and Douglas, went round during the service to snuff them. In the year 1822, due to the energies of a Mr. Beck from Lewes, a minister was appointed to Hastings. Bexhill was then transferred from the Lewes plan to become part of the Hastings circuit and regular services were held, conducted chiefly by local preachers.

There are many stories of the lively times occasionally experienced during these services. During the sermon, and in the prayer meeting that followed, there were constant ejaculations, and there were some real conversions. We can personally remember some of these old folk " giving their experience " at the class meeting. They loved to tell of the time when they " gave their heart to the Lord." One special occasion (often mentioned) was on a New Year's Eve. That night a group of these men had " seen the Old Year out " at the public house. Rolling home much the worse for drink, they heard the Methodists at the top of the hill singing the New Year in. They were attracted by the music to go in, and before they left they decided to give themselves to God. One old brother, who pushed around a cart as a scissor grinder, used to tell how he had often got so drunk that he slept the night by his cart outside the pub.

Another brother started to deliver tracts by the seashore. One day he offered one to a smart young man. The latter refused it, saying, " Can't you see that I am a gentleman? " The old man answered, " I be a gent. too. I be a King's son."

The Mutual Improvement Society.

As the Church developed, more consideration was given to the educational and social side of the christian life. The Mutual Improvement Society did much in this direction. Its programme was somewhat similar to the Wesley Guild of today, but emphasis was given to debates on vital subjects. One feature was for a paper to be read by a member, then the rest would pull it to pieces. Quite a number of young men acquired the art of public speaking at those gatherings.

A Missionary Church Expands.

The missionary spirit was always strong at Belle Hill. By the year 1837 a cause was started at Little Common. Its first chapel was primitively built with mud but the Gospel preached there brought men to God. In spite of severe opposition many held to their faith and continued to witness for their Lord.

In the year 1840 a mission was started in a carpenter's shop at Sidley. Some of our most devoted members laboured in the work there.

In the year 1853 at Pevensey Sluice (now known as Norman's Bay) services were started in the coastguard's boathouse. There was no proper roadway from Bexhill in those days and the preachers had to walk along the beach to get to the service.

By the year 1887 Bexhill began to grow rapidly. Great developments were being planned by Lord De la Warr, and many houses were built south of the railway. In its wisdom the St. Leonards Circuit decided to purchase a plot of land in Sackville Road with the purpose of establishing a cause in the centre of the new town. To prepare for this occasion the Church at Belle Hill began to work. In the year 1890 a group of her devoted members, while retaining their offices at Belle Hill, opened a mission hall in Station Road, opposite the old railway station. Among their number should be mentioned Mr. F. Wimshurst, Mr. F. Christian and Mr. S. Lennard. The work was so blessed by God that in 1892 the school chapel (now known as the Parkhurst Hall) was built, and the work at Station Road was transferred there. A separate society was formed and a minister appointed to serve the two communities.

The Mission Band

Another useful development was the mission band. A group of young people went out as a band, singing the Gospel and conducting open air services in the district, assisted by a portable harmonium. They also held cottage meetings and went into the villages supporting the preachers.

One direct result was seen in the formation of a new society in Hamilton Road (now Chandler Road). Perhaps the finest result was in the members themselves. They learned to pray and to give their testimony in public. In the course of time several of the young men came on the plan as local preachers, others took up work in the Sunday School and as Church Leaders.

PART OF A CONGREG

GATION IN JULY, 1956

Perhaps the greatest missionary enterprise was the result of what appeared at the time to be a disaster, as some of these efforts had to be curtailed and some given up. The reason was that around the years 1909 to 1912 there was a slump in trade, especially in the building industry and many of our best workers became unemployed. A Government-assisted passage scheme made it possible for them to emigrate. As a result several whole families went out to start a new life in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, etc. We rejoiced to know that wherever they went they joined a Church, and where there was none, commenced to hold services in their own homes. Some took their examinations while continuing their employment and in due course were ordained to the Ministry. There are still many in all parts of the English speaking world who look upon " Belle Hill " as their spiritual home, and they are happy to declare that the inspiration in their service for their Lord was found in the " Little Chapel on the Hill."

The Spirit Still Lives.

It is not surprising, then, that when in 1938 a proposal of Methodist Union was made involving the closing down of " Belle Hill," the first reaction was that there was too much to give up, but after long and prayerful consideration it was unanimously decided to join forces with the friends at " Christ Church."

We are confident that still the " Spirit of Old Belle Hill " lives and that the Union is an outstanding result of the guiding hand of the Living Lord.

HARRY HOAD

Primitive Methodism at Christ Church

It was in the year 1865 that a small band of missioners from Hastings came to the village of Sidley, and, standing on the village green, sang hymns and preached the simple gospel of Primitive Methodism. This visit appears to have created much interest among the very small population of the village and district, and further visits led to definite conversions and the regular holding of Sunday and mid-week services in the houses of the new converts. Before long a definite society was formed and the idea of building a chapel was mooted.

In the year 1873, a plot of land was secured at Haddocks Hill (now Wrestwood Road), and a small chapel was built to seat about 100 people, at a cost of £290. For some years the work of the chapel and its ministry met with varying success, until towards the close of the century a remarkable revival in the village of Westfield brought a great spiritual uplift to the Hastings Primitive Methodist Circuit, of which Sidley formed a part. This revival came to Sidley with great power and many men and women, including several young people, experienced the joy of a changed life, and the little chapel became full Sunday by Sunday. Once again the challenge to expand came, but money was scarce, and so the members began to pray—and how they prayed and prayed—believing that the door would open.

Meanwhile, the growing district of Bexhill and Sidley witnessed a great struggle between a firm of brewers and the Temperance Movement over the brewers' attempt to obtain a licence for a public house on the corner of Springfield Road and Holliers Hill. Victory came to the temperance forces, but to make sure that this victory endured, Mr. Marshall Jay, a London churchman, bought the site, and by various means was brought into touch with the society. In this way the prayers were certainly answered, the land was presented to the Primitive Methodist Connection, and with the generous financial assistance of Mr. Jay, backed by sacrificial gifts and labour from members and friends, Christ Church, Springfield Road, was dedicated and opened on 20th March, 1907.

At the time of opening, the building embodied several distinctive features. The tower entrance, the Maltese Cross surmounting the North Wall, the beautiful stained glass window, with central text " Occupy till I come " and the impressive Aberdeen granite foundation stones, engraved with the names " Jesus " and " Emmanuel," also the smaller plain cross at south end of roof, still stand bearing witness to the Christian Faith. The total cost of the building was £1,588, the debt at opening being £968.

From the time of opening, congregations and membership increased, and the second minister of the circuit was moved from St. Leonards to Bexhill to take charge of the work. When the Rev. F. Shimmin commenced his ministry in 1910, a scheme had been inaugurated whereby the debt could be wiped out. The old chapel in Wrestwood Road was sold, special efforts to raise funds were inaugurated, and so successful was the impact both on the Church and neighbourhood, that the Rev. Mr. Shimmin's period of ministry was extended until 1914, and at the seventh anniversary, at a never-to-be-forgotten service, the last £200 was handed to the treasurer as the packed congregation rose and sang the Doxology.

Almost immediately came the blow of the 1914-1948 war, during which the ministry of the church maintained a service of comfort to many who were bereaved, and welcome troops stationed in the neighbourhood. After the war the Eastbourne and Hastings circuits were amalgamated, and the Rev. W. R. Bird was sent as minister-in-charge at Bexhill. Mr. Marshall Jay had some time before presented the church with the plot of ground opposite the church, and it was decided to build there a manse. In the year 1922 this manse was completed, and the Rev. W. R. Bird was its first occupant. Mr. Bird retired from the ministry in July 1924, becoming Bexhill's first librarian and a well-known figure in the life of the town. For the next 10 years there was a succession of ministers, who, during that difficult period sustained the ministry, most of the time as a pastorate, under the care of the Missions Committee of Primitive Methodist Church. They were supported by a band of loyal members who never failed in the belief that a Church with such a beginning would one day go forward to greater things.

In 1932 came the uniting of the various branches of the Methodist Church, and the new Church stationed the Rev. D. M. Bowman, ex-chairman of the Primitive Methodist Darlington District, at Bexhill to further the closest union in the neighbourhood. Gradually the society

was brought into ever closer contact with the Belle Hill ex-Wesleyan society, and in a spirit of real fellowship the two societies merged, the Belle Hill Chapel was closed, and in 1938 a new era began.

Under the ministry of the Rev. J. L. Clough, the new society enlarged the school and classroom premises, and all seemed to point to a new period of advance, when the second world war again curtailed all efforts towards expansion. Once again the church served the whole neighbourhood through that strenuous period, the value of such service being proved by the help given toward the installation of the pipe organ in 1945, which was opened for service free of debt as a thanksgiving to God for all His Love and Mercy throughout those years. The many difficulties due to re-adjustment—national and local—were overcome once again by the loyal service of ministers and members, and the Church approaches its Jubilee with a spiritual vigour inspired by the same vision and sustained by the same intensive prayer, as that which gave birth to Christ Church, Springfield Road.

GEORGE OWERS

The United Society at Christ Church, Springfield Road

Since the union of the various branches of the Methodist Church in 1932, there are many congregations to be found whose congregations are the result of such an amalgamation as has been described in the previous pages. Often a visitor who has come to know the church can say, " Ah, yes, Mr. So and So was one of the old Prims., or such and such a family were old Wesleyans." One of the characteristics of Christ Church that I have frequently commented on is my own total inability to distinguish from the Belle Hill and the Springfield Road groups. From that point of view it is a perfectly united Church—which, of course, is just what it ought to be.

Whenever a group of people are constantly with one another, and planning schemes for the furtherance of so great a cause as the Kingdom of God, there will always be the cut and thrust of debate and occasional differences of opinion as to how these ideas are to be put into practice. This healthy sign of liveliness and energy is to be found in this Christ Church Society. As a Methodist minister who has so far had charge of twenty three separate churches, I can sincerely say that this is a fine church and worthy to be part of the Holy Catholic Church, and I count it a privilege to have come here. I have been trying to think of some of the reasons why this church is so happy, friendly, and successful. A tribute should be paid to my predecessors, for the church is full of their ideas and building. Other reasons are multitudinous, but here are three outstanding ones (a convenient number for a maker of sermons to choose).

First of all, there is the willingness of individuals to help in many different ways. More than one gentleman is very zealous on Sundays to help those who certainly would not be in church but for his car transport. Many ladies are prepared to act as staff members of the creche, so that young mothers can be at the meetings of the Friendship Club. (This creche also draws help from the mothercraft class of one of the Bexhill town schools). These are only two typical examples of individually given practical help to the church's life, but it extends over a much wider field beside.

Then there is a group of lay people who do the work of pastors. With a community of people as large as the number who are with us in greater of lesser degree, it is impossible for the minister to discharge the whole task of such visitation and oversight of the spiritual needs of all the company. I know nearly a dozen folk, some of them quite as expert as a trained minister, who assist me in this work. There are some, the elderly and infirm, who have the Bible read to them by these visitors, and I am frequently called to give Communion to elderly or otherwise incapacitated people that I would never have come to know apart from this devoted company of " lay pastors."

Thirdly, of these reasons for a lively and successful church (which I am choosing out of many more), is the willingness of older folk to accept children gladly and willingly into the church, and cater for their needs. This may sound an odd thing to say, but it is not always easy for an older age group to accept children into their midst from time to time just to cater for their interests alone. But it is as this happens, with the elder congregation still present, that the children come all unconsciously to feel that they are part of this larger and older church, and on a basis within their understanding and enjoyment to grasp. We may be quite certain that where there are children in any worthwhile numbers, corners will get knocked off and books will get tattered, and it takes some discipline to accept the inevitability of this. But it is vital if a Church is gradually to recruit children into its congregation as they grow older. Growing a Church is a long-term process, and the very large group of children at Springfield Road each Sunday morning is significant of the unity of a congregation which covers a very wide age range. A tribute should be paid to the way in which the young folk and their organisations are accepted as part of the whole.

One cannot see the future—it is wisely hidden from us—but we can, at least, determine that these facts, as they undoubtedly are, about Christ Church, shall grow in depth and security, and that more and more of us will come to appreciate their significance. Then the latter glory of this house shall indeed be even greater than the former.

RONALD S. RAWLINGS

"Operation Achievement"

The Challenge of 1957

On such an occasion as this Anniversary, one dominant thought must be that of thanksgiving to those whose vision and generosity made possible the building of this church. Without them all this preaching of so wonderful a Salvation could not have taken place. God's challenge came to them in the years prior to 1907, and these, our fathers in God, gave themselves unstintingly to the building of a house to His Glory.

In the year of the fiftieth anniversary of their achievement I call you to a threefold task:—

1. First and foremost to prayer, worship, and evangelism now in 1957, such as shall offer Jesus Christ to boys and girls, and men and women. "Do the work of an evangelist."

2. To give at our Gift Day, as a thanksgiving for our christian experience, at least £250 towards the task of putting our church fabric in good repair and decoration. This is a call to all sons and daughters of Springfield Road Methodist Church, near and far. An envelope for use at the Gift Day is enclosed. I shall be in the minister's vestry on Saturday, April 6th, between 10 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. and 2 until 6.30 p.m. to receive your gifts. An act of dedication for the total gift will take place during the evening meeting of Tuesday, April 9th.

3. To respond to the challenge to rebuild and re-equip the Ninfield Methodist Church where the need is so great and the resources so small. As we have received the labours of those who went before, so now let us help others to build up the cause of Jesus Christ. A letter explaining the scheme is enclosed.

This threefold task is a hard one, but it is unquestionably God's call, and therefore can be achieved by those who depend upon Him. In fact I would like us to think of it as "Operation Achievement."

God Bless you all,

RONALD S. RAWLINGS.

List of Ministers

BELLE HILL

In Hastings Circuit

1825 Rev. T. Ludlam
1826 Rev. J. Crowe
Official opening in 1826 by the Rev. Jonathan Barker of Brighton (*then called Brightelmstone*).
1827 Rev. James Johnson
1828-29 Rev. H. Davies
1830 Rev. J. W. Thomas
1831-33 Rev. G. Jackson
1834-36 Rev. J. Hollis
1837 Rev. J. Knowles
1838 Rev. W. Davies
1839 Rev. W. Crookes
1840-41 Rev. W. Bytheway
1842 Rev. J. Philp
1843-45 Rev. E. Jennings
1846-48 Rev. J. Brownell
1849 Rev. H. W. Williams
Ministers continued in Hastings until St. Leonards Circuit divided from Hastings 1886.

1886 (Super.) Rev. John Rodwell
(Rev. H. Westenholme at Park Rd.)
1889 Rev. J. Finch

Bexhill Minister appointed 1892

1892 Rev. D. G. Macrae
1893 Rev. A. W. Cooke, M.A.
1894 Rev. F. F. Bretherton, B.A.
1897 Rev. B. Crosby
1900 Rev. H. E. Wright
1903 Rev. H. F. Chaplin
1906 Rev. J. J. Johnstone
1909 Rev. H. H. Whiting
1913 Rev. J. C. Williams
1915 Rev. Birkett Dalby
1919 Rev. J. W. Almond
1923 Rev. J. W. Hallam
1927 Rev. R. H. Hothersall, B.A.
1930 Rev. Leslie H. Clench
1933 Rev. W. A. Parrott
1937 Rev. H. Harrison

CHRIST CHURCH

1905-7 Rev. John Bailey
1907-9 Rev. Bernard Batty
1909-10 Rev. Joseph Metcalf
1910-14 Rev. Frank H. Shimmin
1914-15 Rev. W. L. Spooner
1915-15 Sister May
1916-19 Rev. Danzy Sheen
1919 Rev. R. K. Spedding
1919-20 Rev. J. S. B. Phippen
1920-21 Rev. T. A. Mosley, B.A.
1921-24 Rev. W. R. Bird
1924-26 Rev. John Bennett
1926-28 Rev. Iram G. Wall
1928-31 Rev. Lewis H. Allison
1931-33 Rev. Robert Waugh
1933-38 Rev. David M. Bowman

SINCE AMALGAMATION

1938-40 Rev. J. Leonard Clough
1940-45 Rev. Frank W. Hargreaves
1945-46 Rev. Bennison G. Medd
1946-50 Rev. John R. Berry
1950-55 Rev. Frederick Latham
1955- Rev. Ronald S. Rawlings

F. J. PARSONS
LTD BEXHILL-ON-SEA